

# Change is inevitable, and we can control it

## Anne Ericson



Recently I asked 10 North Andover residents a question: What is the one major change you want to see in our town? These people varied in age, occupation and length of time they had lived in North Andover. However, they all gave me very similar answers.

"Slow down the changes."

"No more changes."

"I moved here to live in a town and I want North Andover to remain a town."

"My neighborhood is a quiet residential street and I want it to stay that way."

"North Andover has always been a beautiful town but now things are getting out of control."

In 1964, when I came to North Andover, it still had the identity of a small town. In fact, at that time, long-time residents told me that North Andover would never grow much more in population because much of the "out country" acreage was considered wetlands and unbuildable. People in the 1960s accepted the construction of Interstate 495 but it took years before the impact of that change became clear to many town residents.

Currently, the North Andover Historical Society in the Old Center of North Andover is featuring an exhibit called "Happy Days: North Andover in the Fifties." The photographs and memorabilia displayed depict a closely-knit community. Everybody seemed to

have participated in the Bicentennial celebrations in June 1955. Downtown Main Street was where people shopped for everyday necessities. Most people lived in precincts 1, 2 or 3 on the north side of Route 125.

Ironically, it was in the early 1950s that North Andover experienced a major change that the town had worked hard to accomplish. Western Electric decided to build a new plant in North Andover. This was, from most perspectives, a positive change which brought much-welcomed jobs, tax revenue and new residents into the town. Of course, it was the changes of Western Electric and I-495 which encouraged new construction in what had once been considered out country. Continuous new construction has changed the population of North Andover from less than

10,000 to 30,000 in 2005.

North Andover has changed a great deal since the "Happy Days" of the 1950s. However, we still have green spaces. We still have the Old Common. We still have the stately mansions and rolling fields on Academy Road. Steven's Pond still exists for summer recreation. Main Street still has the post office, Town Hall, Fire Department and quite a few stores providing both necessities and luxuries. In many ways, downtown North Andover still resembles the photos taken during the 1955 Bicentennial.

However, change can be identified everywhere in our town. Certainly the new North Andover High School is a magnificent change from the Johnson High School which was used until the early 1950s. A new upscale mall has just opened on Route 114 and

other mall projects are planned for that road. During the past, several neighborhoods in different parts of town went before the Planning Board or the Zoning Board to protect the residential identity of their own neighborhoods. Construction projects for both single homes and condominiums are in place in every area of the town. Finally, after decades of traffic problems, change is coming to the traffic pattern of the Old Center.

Change in any community is inevitable and constant. Often the effects of change are not recognized until much later. However, there are processes available to any community that can ensure that the process of change is gradual and considered. A preservation restriction can be placed on a private or public building to guarantee that the facade or historically sig-

nificant features of the building will not be changed. Many communities have adopted a demolition delay bylaw which requires approval from the Historic Commission before an owner or developer can tear down an existing building to build a new structure. In North Andover, the Old Center is a town-approved historical district and the residents of Machine Shop Village are currently considering the option to become a town-approved historical district.

Hopefully, in North Andover, residents will take advantage of these options to ensure that changes in our town are thoughtful, considered and positive for all of us who love this town.

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